

Sinclair Broadcasting's decision to force their stations to air an anti-Kerry documentary days before the election is a clear example of the necessity of strong enforcement of the Fairness Doctrine. This is particularly the case in these days of massive media consolidation.

Broadcasters use the public airwaves free of charge, and so this access is a privilege, and not a right. this privilege is earned in part by a legal obligation to serve the public interest. Part of "the public interest" in a democracy must be the ability for viewers to hear many points of view. But when large companies control the airwaves, we face the danger that an unscrupulous broadcaster can use these airwaves for demagoguery. Consider how important the United States felt it was that people in Eastern Europe to hear fair western news reporting when their countries, and all their broadcast media were under the contro of communist dictatorships. Consider that the slaughter in Rwanda was instigated and supported by broadcasts that whipped up ethnic hatred. These are extreme examples of course, but they point to the danger of monopolies or oligopolies in broadcasting, and the abuse of the power inherent in such control.

Sinclair Broadcasting claims that they are simply running a "news story". This is arrant nonsense. The charges made in the movie they are forcing their stations to run are old and stale. They were put out ad nauseam by the "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth" and were amply covered and investigated by news organizations in the late summer of 2004. This forced broadcast is nothing more than an infomercial for the George Bush re-election campaign, and should be treated as such by the commission. Airing such partisan material without providing equal time for reply is a gross abuse of the privilege of access to the airwaves.

Sinclair's actions show why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, and we should take public service obligations seriously at license renewal time. If Sinclair Broadcasting continues to abuse its access privilege by running one-sided propaganda, the FCC should revoke that privilege, in the interest of the fairness that is necessary for a democracy to function. Thank you.